

Finding of No Significant Impact

Keystone Peak Prescribed Burn
NEPA Number DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2015-0009-EA

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment (EA), and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, described below, I have determined that the proposed action with the design specifications will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

Context

The Sierrita Mining and Ranching Company are the private land owners within the project area; they are also the grazing allotment lessee, a partner in the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance (AVCA), and a co-operator/contributor to the burn implementation process. They will provide equipment and personnel to complete road maintenance, provide an area for base camp during burn operations, and control access to the project area through private land.

The Keystone Peak Prescribed Burn Unit (project area) is located in the Sierrita Mountains, approximately 25 miles south southwest of Tucson, Arizona and 10 miles west of Green Valley, Arizona (Figure 1-1 in attached EA). There are several towers on Keystone Peak, most of which are critical to wireless services in this area. The Arizona Department of Public Safety has a tower where one BLM repeater and one BLM repeater control station is hosted. In addition to law enforcement radios, the Department of Public Safety tower hosts Department of Corrections, Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), Emergency Medical Services, Interagency Radio System stations, military range support equipment, and Arizona Department of Transportation equipment. It also houses a link in the southern loop of the statewide telecommunications microwave network. The U.S. Border Patrol also has a tower there (which hosts National Park Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Federal Bureau of Investigation antennae among others). Pima County also has equipment. All of the wireless phone companies operating in this area have equipment there, and all of those towers are critical to local wireless services. The Keystone Peak Communications site is critical infrastructure for Federal, State, and local agencies and provides continuity of operations for health and safety to law enforcement, fire, and resources personnel. In the event of a significant loss at Keystone Peak, critical communications capability would be lost that would affect Southwest Border operations for various Federal, State and local agencies.

This proposed action has been reviewed to determine if it conforms to applicable land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5, BLM MS 1617.3. The proposed action is in conformance with the Phoenix Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), approved in 1988, as amended by the Arizona Statewide Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) for Fire, Fuels and Air Quality Management. The LUPA and Record of Decision were approved in 2004.

The proposed action is consistent with the LUPA Land Use Allocation 1-Wildland Fire Use: Areas suitable for wildland fire use for resource management benefit:

- Areas where wildland fire is desired, and there are few or no constraints for its use. Where conditions are suitable, unplanned and planned wildfire may be used to achieve desired objectives, such as improve vegetation, wildlife habitat or watershed conditions, maintain non-hazardous levels of fuels, reduce the hazardous effects of unplanned wildland fires and meet resource objectives. Where fuel loading is high but conditions are not initially suitable for wildland fire, fuel loads are reduced by mechanical, chemical or biological means to reduce hazardous fuels levels and meet resource objectives (includes Wildland Urban Interface [WUI] areas), (BLM 2004a).

The proposed action is consistent with the LUPA Desired Future Conditions:

- Each vegetation community is maintained within its natural range of variation in plant composition, structure, and function, and fuels loads are maintained below levels that are considered to be hazardous, (BLM 2004A)
- Plains and Great Basin Grasslands-The Desired Future Conditions are for a predominance of perennial grass cover, reduced cover of annual grasses, and for fire to naturally inhibit the invasion of woody shrubs such as rabbitbrush, snakeweed, and big sage brush, (BLM 2004a).

The proposed action is consistent with the LUPA Management Actions:

- In areas suitable for fire where fuel loading is high, BLM will utilize biological, mechanical or chemical treatments, and some prescribed fire to maintain non-hazardous levels of fuels and meet resource objectives, (BLM 2004a).
- For all fire management activities (wildfire suppression, appropriately managed wildfire use, prescribed fire, and mechanical, chemical, and biological vegetation treatments), Conservation Measures will be implemented as part of the Proposed Action to provide statewide consistency in reducing the effects of fire management actions on federally threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate ("Federally protected") species, (BLM 2004a)

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the 10 Significance Criteria described at 40 CFR 1508.27. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse:

Adverse: Short term, direct impacts to air quality, grazing, soils, and migratory birds from the prescribed fire.

Beneficial: Long term, direct and indirect impacts to grazing, land health, soils, special status species, fish and wildlife, and migratory birds.

2. Degree of effect on public health and safety:

No effect.

3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetland, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas:**

Designated critical habitat for the Chiricahua leopard frog is not within, but is close to the project area.

4. **Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:**

This is not a highly controversial project.

5. **Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk:**

With prescribed fire there is always the possibility the fire could get away and breach the boundary of the burn area and it could affect the infrastructure on the top of the peak.

6. **Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration:**

None.

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts:**

None.

8. **Degree to which the action may adversely affect district, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources:**

None.

9. **Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat:**

BLM consulted with USFWS on the jaguar, ocelot, lesser long-nosed bat, Chiricahua leopard frog (and associated critical habitat which is in proximity to the project area), and Pima pineapple cactus. USFWS concurred with BLM's may affect, not likely to adversely affect determinations on all of these species.

10. **Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law:**

None.

Field Manager, Tucson Field Office

Date